



Keck School of Medicine
University of Southern California

May 11, 2007

Department of
Preventive Medicine

Dr. Kristina Thayer
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
P.O. Box 12233, MD B2-08,
Research Triangle Park, NC, 27709

RE: Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention
Research Program Evaluation

Dear Dr. Thayer:

As Center Director for one of the Children's Environmental Health Centers, I am responding to the April 6, 2007 Review Panel Report on the Center for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research Program. I have several areas of concern summarized in the following sections.

Multidisciplinary research is a fundamental characteristic of the Centers that has resulted in significant scientific advances. It appears that the review committee did not fully appreciate the record of achievement of the Centers that was due, in large part, to the true multidisciplinary nature of the Centers' program. The review panel's recommendation to shift Children's Center research from multidisciplinary population-based studies to focus more on basic science could jeopardize what the panel acknowledges to be "perhaps the greatest strength of the current Children's Center program." The successes of the children's centers are due in large measure to the multidisciplinary nature of the centers and these successes would not have occurred with single discipline approaches as in most R01s. These limitations in the evaluation process may have been due to the fact that the panel was charged with reviewing the appropriateness of Center mechanism and had limited time and resources to review the scientific accomplishments of the Centers. It would be prudent to revisit the evaluation of the scientific contributions by reopening the evaluation for a more complete review of the science.

The multidisciplinary approach is a hallmark of the Centers. It is critical to maintain a balance of basic science and population-based science, leading to intervention research, and policy recommendations. This approach is critical for translational research. Excess emphasis on one approach or discipline is unlikely

to maximize the productivity of NIEHS sponsored children's environmental health research.

Much research is needed in children's environmental health. Broadening the scope of environmental health issues is needed for investigation of exposures, susceptibility and diseases. This will require additional resources in a time of tight budgets.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and translation initiatives are essential to improving the health of our citizens. The Panel credits the Children's Centers for elevating the "visibility of children's environmental health research," and, in some cases, leading "successful intervention and prevention programs." However, the recommendations do not include a strong recognition of the need for translation of scientific results through community outreach, interventions to reduce exposures, and policy initiatives. It is essential that translation initiatives be an integral part of the Centers -- not optional to be provided through other funding.

The proposed mandate requiring three R01s followed by two more in order to qualify as a Center is problematic. In fact, establishing a multidisciplinary team through independent R01s is likely to be antithetical to the goals of integrated research. The timing and integration of reviews at different study sections make this approach essentially infeasible. Clearly, a "center-type" mechanism has a strong record of productivity.

I would urge that NIEHS continue to support the Center mechanism as a means of conducting research on children's environmental health issues; continue to view population-based science as a critical component of children's environmental health research; continue to support community-based studies and translation of research findings; and that it not adopt the proposed mandate regarding existing R01s to qualify as a Center.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my viewpoints on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Gilliland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Frank Gilliland M.D., Ph.D.
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